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AUTHOR Logie, Carol
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE) in Trinidad and Tobago, focusing on the educational environment and demographic factors within ECCE. A representative national sample of 2,370 children, 175 teachers, and 883 parents from 79 public and private centers across the country completed questionnaires or interviews. The study found that although most teachers had completed secondary education and had been teaching for more than 5 years, many earned less than the minimum wage. It was also found that the delivery of ECCE was negatively affected by the lack of teacher training and the refusal of teachers to use non-traditional methods. Many programs: were highly academically oriented, often at a developmental level above that of the children; limited the use of concrete materials; and limited children's opportunities to socialize. The study concluded that to improve the provision of ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago, policies need to be adopted that focus on upgrading the skills of ECCE staff, upgrading teacher salaries, providing inservice training facilitators, and improve the existing ECCE teacher training programs. (MDM)

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THE STATUS OF ECCE PROVISION IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

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It is another bright sunny tropical day. The dry season is once again with us and I am sitting next to the teacher's small wooden desk, chatting informally about the centre's programme. It is 8:30 am, the teacher known to parents and all who work and interact in the environment as Auntie Judy, awaits the arrival of the children. The theme in the classroom is Easter and a white rabbit is ruminating in a decorated cardboard hutch on the floor in one of the classrooms. The large open plan room is well lit and attractively divided into five learning centres which include dramatic play props, puppets, the grocery and home corners. Children's work is displayed on the walls at the children's eye level, or hung on 'clothes lines' attractively placed in tic- tac -toe rows above our heads. The smell of freshly baked coconut cakes is in the air. The senior teacher I am interviewing excuses herself to test the last batch that has come out of the oven.

Parents, and older children shepherding in younger siblings, are also arriving."Excuse me" she says and leaves to chat with a mother. School fees are discussed and the teacher uses another desk to conduct her administrative duties. Boys and girls ages 3-5 continue to arrive and approximately 32 children are expected. Boys are dressed in khaki shorts and blue and white checked short sleeved shirts and girls in blue and white sleeveless shift dresses. Two aides are re-arranging shelves with attractive manipulative toys and home-made musical instruments from soft -drink plastic

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bottles, biscuit tins and pieces of wood. The senior teacher returns and speaks to one of the teacher aides arranging the shelves, "check Kisha's lunch kit -see if her mother sent anything." Children and parents were asked to contribute egg shells for the class project on Easter eggs. Some twenty children have arrived. It is almost 9 am and the children seem to know the routine. They put their lunch kits on the lunch kit shelves and most of them move to the shelves where they choose a toy, puzzle or book and return to a brightly coloured child-sized table. Others talk to children next to them, others stare at the adults almost expectantly. The morning activities have begun.

The above excerpt represents a small portion of the day in the life of a group of children ages 3-5 in a centre in Trinidad and Tobago. It gives a snapshot impression of the inter-related aspects of life in classrooms and allows us to view the world in which children in this environment spend a large portion of their day. Unfortunately, however, this is not a common replica of the quality of life within classrooms. Typically, for those who live and work in public and private ECCE centres, provision in very different from the picture presented above.

In this article I hope to explore the status of provision in Trinidad and Tobago by examining the importance of good environments for children, and the demographic composition of those who work and live within these environments. Most importantly, the paper will critically assess the practices of adults who influence and construct the quality of the environment in which our young children are placed. Children under 5 are sent daily to ECCE centres and spend large portions of their formative years under the tutalege of adults who provide for the needs of children in their care. It is therefore imperative that we as responsible adults, assess the type of provision or services given. Consequently, the following questions must be addressed: What is the nature of the service provided to young children - does it foster or hinder their growth ? Are the practices observed in centres developmentally appropriate? What standards, if any, are being used to

determine quality assurance across communities? Are there problems which affect the quality of provision provided? What are the causes of these problems? How are these problems being dealt with? This paper seeks to address these issues.

> Good environments for learning exercise and challenge the developing potentials. Poor environments for learning do not permit newly developing skills to be used, or demand that these skills be employed at a level of competence too far beyond the learner's reach
> (Hohmann, Banet and Weikart, 1979, p. 1).

Hohmann, Bener and Weikart (1979) argue it is of critical importance to know and understand the components of good and poor environments, for they can foster or hinder the development of young children. Similarly, one of the major concerns in the current literature on quality provision is how do we 1. identify good environments and 2. identify adults in those environments who offer poor quality provision? Five indicators of quality provision have been identified within the literature as affecting programme delivery. These are: 1.children's activities; 2.centre-based practices; 3.socio-emotional development of children; 4. the interpersonal environment and 5. community involvement in the delivery of the programme. While these are not the only indicators of quality, this study found these five indicators extremely usefully in the study of ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Study

One of the concerns I had before embarking on the study was the lack of empirical data on ECCE provision. Prior to 1992 ECCE was not considered part of the formal education system of Trinidad and Tobago and data collected by institutions were largely used for their own purposes. Moreover, there was no public repository of data for public dissemination. While there are two major studies on ECCE, the lack of comprehensive data for public dissemination continues to plague the lives of planners, policy makers and educators.My attention quickly focused on the development of a national survey on provision during the period 1993 - 1995. A representative sample of public and

private centres was chosen across the geographic regions of Trinidad and Tobago. The sample included 2370 children, 175 teachers and 883 parents from 79 centres.

Method

One of the main aims of the study was the examination of the context of provision. The Classroom Practices Inventory - CPI (Hyson, Hirch-Pasek, and Rescorla, 1990), a 26 item measure of appropriate and inappropriate practices based on the National Association for the Education of the Young Child (NAEYC) was used. A Likert rating scale of 1-5, described the various activities and practices observed in a classroom. The scale ranged from 1 -not at all like this classroom, to 5 - very much like this classroom (See Appendix B). Based on the NAEYC criteria on what young children and adults should/ and should not be doing in centre-based facilities, 14 appropriate and 12 inappropriate behaviours and activities were examined. Five quality indicators: children's activities; centre-based practices; socio-emotional development; the interpersonal environment and community influences on ECCE provision were examined.

1. THE CONTEXT OF PRESENT PROVISION

The public education system which provides Early Childhood Care and Education is at a crossroad in its development. To date there have been valuable changes which have been implemented to improve the quality of ECCE provision. The following is a discussion of the context of ECCE provision through a discriptive account of its demographic features and an analysis of children's experiences and adult practices within the settings.

1.1 Demographic Features of ECCE Provision

It was estimated in 1995, that there were approximately 14,000 four year old children in Trinidad and Tobago. Of the 14,000, approximately half attended ECCE settings, with an enrolment of 4,000, and 3,000 at public and private centres, respectively (High/Scope 1995, p. 3.1). Table 1 illustrates a drop in enrolment from 1986-1995 . Although enrolment fell by 29% children/teacher

ratios in public centres remain relatively steady (between 11-14/1). At present there are 3562 children between the ages of 3-5 at 146 public centres in Trinidad and Tobago (Ministry of Education, Planning Unit,1997).

Characteristics of teachers

Of the 79 teachers I interviewed in both settings across the country, 6.3% had 3 - 12 months experience, while 39.2% had at least 1-5 years of teaching experience. Most teachers had over 5 years teaching experience (54.5%). With the exception of 1 male teacher in the private setting, all teachers were female. Typically, teachers worked with groups of 6 - 30 children.

Table 1 Early Childhood Care and Education Centres by Number of Children, Teachers and Children/Teacher Ratios in Trinidad and Tobago.

YEAR	NO.OF GOV'T. ~~/ASSISTED~~ CENTRES	CHILDREN ENROLLED	TEACHING STAFF	CHILDREN/ TEACHER RATIOS
1986/87	50	2086	150	14
1987/88	49	1956	147	13
1988/89	49	1791	147	12
1989/90	49	1761	138	13
1990/91	50	1631	139	12
1991/92	50	1563	115	14
1992/93	48	1418	126	11
1993/94	48	1545	111	14
1994/95	48	1487	109	14

Source: Ministry of Education: Planning Unit, 1997.

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Teachers in both settings were generally between 21 - 40 years of age, although in the private setting, 50% of teachers, many of them with no professional training in ECCE, were under 20 years of age. No teachers in the public setting reported being over 50, while 25% of the teachers in the private centres were over 51 years old.

The Trinidad and Tobago Early Childhood Survey (High/Scope, 1995), indicatedthat the average age of teachers is higher in the private setting than in the public setting with all teachers surveyed being female with approximately seven years working experience for public centre teachers and just over twelve years experience for teachers in the private setting (See Table 2).

Table 2 Characteristics of Teachers in Public and Private Centres in Trinidad/Tobago

Characteristic	Public (N=28)	Private (N=28)
Age		
Mean	29.8	41.0
SD	7.0	13.1
Median	28.0	39.0
Gender		
% Female	100.0	100.0
Years of Full - Time Education		
Mean	12.0	11.9
SD	2.8	3.3
Median	12.0	12.0
Years of Teacher Training		
Mean	2.5	1.2
SD	0.9	1.2
Median	3.0	1.0
Years Working With 3 to 5-year-olds		
Mean	7.5	12.3
SD	4.6	9.3
Median	6.0	8.0

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Source: The Trinidad and Tobago Early Childhood Survey (1995)

The most recent figures from the Ministry of Education (1997) indicate that number 79% (246) are trained and 21% are untrained (64).

Academic attainment (staff) When academic attainment was examined, teachers in the public and private setting had attained the same academic levels. In the private setting, 78.3% of teachers completed both primary and secondary education, 5.1% also had further education and attended courses at technical colleges or completed the Advance Level Caribbean Examination Certificate (CXC), 16.7% reported completing only primary education. In the SERVOL centres, 20% of teachers had only primary level education. None of the teachers in either setting had any training at University level.

Professional Attainment Percentage distribution of professional attainment of care/givers and teachers in ECCE settings in Trinidad and Tobago indicated that in the public setting, 90% of SERVOL teachers have had training in early childhood education (See Table 2, and 77.7% of teachers at government centres have attended short courses offered by SERVOL or at government workshops.

In the private setting, 25% had attended short courses, 10% reported completing Montessori courses. Of interest is the high percentage of untrained teachers in the private setting (56.7%).

Table 3 Professional attainment of teacher/care giver in public and private settings

Professional Attainment	PUBLIC		PRIVATE
	N=9 Government	N=10 SERVOL	N=60
	% n	% n	% n
SERVOL short course	44.4 (4)	30 (3)	
SERVOL 3 year course		30.0 (3)	
SERVOL plus other short course		10 (1)	
SERVOL three year course & short course		20 (2)	1.7 (1)
Government short course	33.3 (3)		25 (15)
University Course	- -	- -	- -
Montessori			10 (6)
Montessori plus short course			6.7 (4)
None of the above	22.2 (2)	10 (1)	56.7 (34)

Teacher's Earnings Teachers' earnings were generally below the poverty level. In the public setting, 88.9% and 50% of teachers in government and SERVOL centres, respectively, earn below the minimum wage of $800 TT per month for full employment. It could be argued that most teachers in the public setting work on average about 5 hours per day, however, teachers referred to their employment as full-time since they worked five days per week. In the private setting there is no pattern of monthly earning and it did not appear to vary due to academic qualification of teachers. Monthly earnings for full-time employment ranged from less than $200 TT to over $1200 TT. Salaries of over 1200 TT, however, were noted in centres where the reporting teacher also owned and administered the centre. Most teachers in the public and private setting were found to earn between $401 - $999 TT monthly.

Parent Characteristics

Data from the High/Scope Survey (1995) indicate that 74% of fathers of public centre children and 93% of fathers of private centre children were active in the labour force (See Table 4). However, higher percentages of private centre mothers than of public centre mothers were in the

professional/managerial category (26% vs 15%) and in the semi skilled category (30% vs 15%). A large percentage of private centre single mothers were categorised as semiskilled, while a larger percentage of the public centre mothers were categorised as unskilled.

Table 4 Characteristics of Parents of 4-Year-Old Children Attending Public and Private Centers In Trinidad/Tobago

Characteristics of Group	Public (N=112)	Private (N=116)
Years of Full-Time Education		
Fathers		
N	53	57
Mean	10.3	11.0
SD	3.3	3.5
Median	11.5	12
Mothers		
N	95	110
Mean	10.3	11.1
SD	2.9	3.3
Median	10	12
Single Mothers Only		
N	33	41
Mean	10.1	10.7
SD	2.9	3.3
Median	10	12
Percentage Active in Labour Fource		
Fathers	74	93
Mothers	44	47
Single Mothers Only	53	56
Percentage in Each Occupational Level		
Fathers		
N	37	53
Professional/Managerial	14	26
Clerical/Sales	11	8
Semi-Skilled	40	60
Unskilled	35	4
Mothers		
N	40	53
Professional/Managerial	15	26
Semi-skilled	15	30
Unskilled	38	25
Single Mothers Only		
N	18	23
Professional/Managerial	17	22
Clerical/Sales	17	17
Semi-skilled	5	26
Unskilled	61	35

Source: The Trinidad and Tobago Early Childhood Survey: Table 3.3

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Children in the Centre

Teachers reported that children at the SERVOL and government centres were primarily from low income families. Unlike the public setting, children in the private setting were reported to come from every socio-economic stratum of the society. Of the 2370 children observed, less than 1% were children with special needs and those children were almost all in the public setting. Teachers, however, when asked whether they would like to work with children with special needs in their classroom, 33%, 100% said yes in the private and public setting respectively.

1.2. Children's experiences and adult practices in ECCE facilities in Trinidad and Tobago

Children's experiences

When children's experiences were analysed, several trends emerged. Firstly, all sample sites visited had clearly structured times for children's activities. The timetable provided the framework for the context of provision. The following is a description of most observed timetabled activities across settings. Assembly or circle time, was scheduled as the first activity at most centres in the public and private settings. It included the singing of the national anthem, religious songs, a story read by the teacher, recitation of new rhymes, the alphabet, or number work. The activity, lasted between 5 -20 minutes. Assembly was a large group, teacher directed activity usually for all children and adults in the centre. Everyone was involved in the same activity at the same time. Children sat on the floor or brought their chairs to the centre of the room in a semicircle and answered questions which teachers/caregivers asked. Free-play in public and private centres, for example, ranged from children selecting their own activities from materials on a shelf to being given a piece of equipment and left to play with minimal supervision during arrival/departure times. Math activities ranged from number work, particularly in the private setting, to concrete experiences, most often observed in public settings.

Language arts in both settings generally referred to story telling activities around a theme. The time was used for introducing new themes for the week or a new project such as: Easter, eggs, rabbits and reaffirming new concepts. Language arts was the term generally used in public setting timetables to refer to language development activities. In the private setting, language development activities were referred to in the timetable as reading-readiness or writing activities. However, in the private setting, more structured activities were observed, ditto sheets, writing notebooks, and primary school reading books were an important part of the programme. While activities were timetabled it was generally acknowledged by teachers in the public setting, that the programme was an integrated one and timetabled activities may vary according to the needs of the children.

Dramatic play on the timetable referred to children's make-believe and role-playing in areas designed by the teachers and children. Many children used the articles of clothing and props in these activity areas to explore and figure things out. Materials included dolls, stuffed animals, adult size kitchen utensils and adult shoes and dresses. This activity was timetabled only in the public setting. Table games referred to the use of manipulatives, mainly puzzles but were only timetabled in the private setting. Since the use of manipulatives was an integral part of the programme in the public setting, it was not time-tabled,and children were observed using puzzles during the public programmes.

Science on the timetable referred to activities which allowed children to discover or explore. Materials such as magnifying glass, stones, rocks and leaves for example, were observed on tables in the public setting and children were seen interacting with various objects. Finally, recall was timetabled as the last activity in the public setting only, and referred to the time when the teacher reviewed what children had done during the day.

Children's activities Secondly, the early childhood environment in both public and private settings packed a variety of activities into a programme day. With exception of : arrival and departure, transition activities, and, cleaning up, most activities took between 15 - 20 minutes. In programmes with less than 41/2 hours of service, children were observed participating in 13 types

of activities during the course of the day in public and private settings. From the timetables and observed practice, the time in activities such as science, math, and reading-readiness activities varied across settings. While most children in the private setting spent large blocks of time (about 14%) on mathematics, language, reading readiness activities and a variety of 30 minute activities. Activities such as math, assembly, snack, science, table games and lunch occupied the largest block of time in the public setting regardless of the length of the programme.

In programmes with longer periods of operation, the largest blocks of time were spent on lunch and rest and table games. In the private setting the largest blocks of time were spent on writing and reading exercises.

A third trend observed was that children, particularly in the private setting, spent time listening or watching the adult in their environment since communicating with other children within close proximity was not encouraged. Generally, children were extremely obliging and followed the teachers instructions most of the time. Children were expected to look, listen and respond to the teacher's instructions.

Fourthly, most activities regardless of setting were primarily teacher-initiated, and children spent their time responding to requests. Very little interaction was observed which allowed children to talk freely for more than one minute. Circle time or assembly generally elicited one word answers to questions posed by the teacher and very few environments used the activity to allow children to express their ideas and encourage divergent thinking. Most environments had a limited number of materials and children spent most of their day at their desks taking part in activities chosen for them by the adult/s in their perspective settings. In the private setting, children generally were not given many daily opportunities to take part in outdoor play, dramatic play, and block play.

When timetables of programmes which offered longer periods of service > 41/2 hours, were observed, they offered children about 14 activities, most of them similar to those of the shorter programme. Public centres devoted longer periods of time for lunch / rest, science and table

games. Private centres generally spent more time on math/ language arts and writing/reading readiness (See Figure 1).

Another observed trend was that children in centre-based ECCE settings in Trinidad and Tobago, had little or no opportunities (less than 1%) to engage in sand and water play. While small quantities of blocks were observed in SERVOL centres, not all children used them during the course of the week.

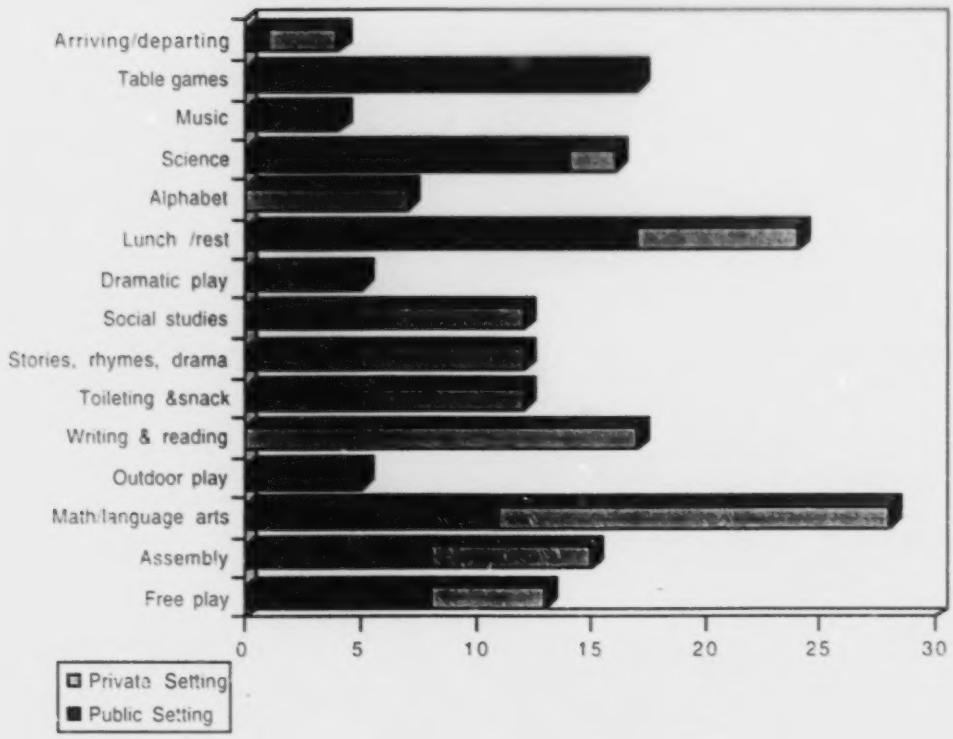

Figure 1 Percentage distribution of how children spend their time in programmes offering more than 4 $^{1}/_{2}$ hours of provision

Developmentally Appropriate Activities for Children

Bredekamp (1986) describe developmental appropriateness as having two dimensions, age appropriateness and individual appropriateness. Age appropriateness is based on the human development theory which indicates that there are universal, predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in children during the first 9 years - regardless of cultural differences. These predictable sequences occur in all areas of development: physical, emotional, social, and cognitive. Therefore, knowledge of typical development of children within the age span is crucial to programmes which offer activities and learning opportunities appropriate to the needs of individual children. Programmes, therefore, reflect the assumptions of the teacher/caregiver's beliefs.

Individual appropriateness refers to each child as an individual or unique person with his/her own growth pattern, learning style and family background (Biber,1984; Elkind, 1986; Spodek, 1985). Thus appropriate curriculum and adult interaction with children must respond to individual differences. Within the philosophy supported by NAEYC's Criteria for High Quality Early Childhood Programs, learning in young children takes place through the interaction between children's thoughts and their experiences with materials, ideas, and people. These experiences must match the child's developing abilities, while challenging children's interest and understanding.

A developmentally appropriate curriculum therefore is planned to be appropriate for the age of children within the group and is implemented bearing in mind the developmental levels of individual children. Learning is seen as not occurring in narrowly defined subject areas since children's development and learning are integrated. Children are seen as needing years of play with real objects before they are able to understand the meanings of symbols. The child's participation in self-directed play with real-life experiences is a critical element of the developmentally appropriate curriculum. Basic learning materials and activities include: sand, water, clay, unit blocks, puzzles, manipulative toys, dramatic play props, items for exploration and discovery and a changing selection of attractive books, paper supplies, water-based paint and material for creative

expression; large muscle equipment; and classroom tasks for children, such as helping with routines. Pictures and stories are used frequently to build on real experiences.

Integrated components of appropriate programmes which display appropriate practice for 4, and 5 year olds, emphasise language, activity and large and small muscle activity. Appropriate practice as stated by NAEYC, support and provide support and protection to children and help them to develop independence. Adults provide opportunities for 3 year olds to demonstrate and practice newly developed self-help skills; such as pouring,washing-up and dressing themselves. Recognising that while trying to keep up with older children, younger children may exhaust themselves more easily through physical activity, adults encourage children to do restful activities and take naps throughout the day. Adults also provide many opportunities for play either by themselves, and with other children. Children read stories, play music and enter and leave the group at will. Environments that adults manage provide plenty of space and time indoors and outdoors for children to explore and exercise their large and small muscle skills: running catching a ball and jumping, for example. Teachers also provide large amounts of uninterrupted time for children to persist at self-chosen tasks and activities. Teachers/caregivers also act as facilitators and guide children through their activities rather that teach or lecture by telling or giving information most of the day. Primarily, developmentally appropriate practice for adults who work in the environment is based on the knowledge of how children learn.

Appropriate environments, therefore, provide ample materials and opportunities for children to develop fine motor skills; such as puzzles, construction sets, beads and art materials. Adults also encourage children to develop language by speaking frequently to individual children and listening to responses. Adults also provide many experiences and opportunities to extend children's language and musical abilities and to develop environments which children can explore to exercise their natural curiosity.

In inappropriate centre-based facilities, adults would expect children to entertain themselves for long periods of time. Children would be required to engage in tasks which are more appropriate for

older children. Adults rather than children perform routine tasks (like cleaning up or getting their own materials), because it is faster and less messy. Adults also expect children to participate in whole group activities most of the day. They read stories to all children at once, expecting them to sit and listen quietly. Children are also not allowed to leave the large group activity without permission. Similarly, children are also restricted from physical activity ("No running!") or are provided with limited space and equipment for large motor activities.

In inappropriate provision for 4 and 5 year olds according to NAEYC, teachers dominate the environment by talking to the whole group most of the time and telling children what to do. Reading and writing instruction stress isolated skill development such as recognizing single letters, reciting the alphabet, singing the alphabet, colouring within defined lines or being instructed on the correct formation of letters. on printed lines. Children work individually at desks or tables or spent large periods of time listening to teacher directions in a whole group. Teachers also spend time dealing with rules, punishing children who misbehave. Children are also required to respond correctly with one right answer, and rote memorisation and drills are emphasised. Small motor activity is limited to writing with pencils or colouring predrawn forms, music and gross motor activity are only provided when time permits. Rather than being an integral part of the programme, outdoor activity is viewed as interfering with instructional time and if provided, is seen as a way to get rid of children's excess energy. Children's cognitive development is also seen as "fragmented into content areas such as math, science or social studies and times are set aside to concentrate on each area" (Bredekamp, 1986, p. 56).

In programmes with inadequate provision, teachers communicate with parents only when problems arise and parents view teachers as experts and feel isolated from their children's experiences. Teachers direct all activity and all children are expected to perform the same tasks and achieve the same skills at the same time.

Children's Activities

Appropriate children's activities - The findings

When the following five indicators: children's activities; centre-based practices; social and emotional development; the interpersonal environment and community influences were observed in ECCE settings in Trinidad and Tobago, patterns emerged which pointed to a mix of appropriate and inappropriate practices. In many instances there were differences in public and private settings, in centre-based practices and in the number of opportunities children were exposed to. Differences and similarities were also observed within both settings when the interpersonal environment and strategies used were scrutinised

Table 5. Percentage distribution of centres offering concrete experiences to children across settings, based on the CPI measure

Appropriate Practice	Public		Private
	Gov't	SERVOL	
Children are involved in concrete three dimensional learning activities	n=9	n=10	n=60
	% n	% n	% n
Setting compared to appropriate practice			
- Not like this setting	- -	- -	60 (36)
- Very little like this setting	22 (2)	- -	20 (12)
- Somewhat like this setting	45 (4)	10 (1)	7 (4)
- Much like this setting	- -	10 (1)	3 (2)
- Very much like this setting	33 (3)	80 (8)	10 (6)

The most frequently observed appropriate activities were 1. children working with concrete learning materials closely related to their daily experiences and 2.children involved in choosing their own activities when adults gave them the opportunity to do so. These appropriate practices were most often observed in SERVOL centres. The scores indicate that on average developmentally appropriate activities for children were frequently observed in SERVOL classrooms.

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In the public setting, however, over 30% focused very much on concrete experiences, particularly in the SERVOL setting where children in 80% of the centres engage in concrete experiences.

All public settings had children working on concrete learning activities. However, the picture was strikingly different in the private setting, where children in 60% of the centres were not involved in concrete three-dimensional activities during the course of the day. In fact, few materials were observed which were closely related to children's daily life were observed (See Table 5).

Classrooms in government centres while they generally mirrored the structural characteristics of SERVOL centres, did not frequently offer appropriate activities for 4-5 year olds. The items with lower ratings (around 2.5) for government-classrooms dealt with the kinds of opportunities children had to (1) physically move around the classroom, (2) work on their own in small groups (3) experiment with writing, invent their own spelling or dramatic play. However, these items were sometimes seen at SERVOL centres.

When the public setting was observed, therefore, many appropriate activities ascribed to by NAEYC were sometimes seen they were most frequently observed in SERVOL centres. However, when the private setting was observed the practice is remarkably different. Classrooms in the private setting consistently on average scored less than 2 (rarely seen or very little like this classroom), on all developmentally appropriate items which rated children's activities. Unlike classrooms in public setting, private setting classrooms rarely allowed children to select their own activities, become involved in concrete learning activities, work in small groups or use a variety of art materials. Nor were children frequently exposed to activities which allowed them to engage in dramatic play, experiment with writing and drawing or dictating their own stories.

Inappropriate children's activities Typically, children did the same activity at the same time. in a large group, they used workbooks known as exercise books and participated in reading an writing activities which emphasised direct teaching of letter recognition and the alphabet. Children also had planned lessons in writing with pencils and coloured pre-drawn forms. Table 6 illustrates

the average rating of activities.The private setting represented many of the activities considered to be inappropriate for 4-5 year olds.

Children in the public setting had many more opportunities than children in the private setting to select their own activities from a variety of learning areas prepared by the adults in the environment for appropriate activities. Furthermore, children in the private setting had very little opportunities for free play activities, with > 60% not having opportunities for these activities.

Table 6 Overall average scores of inappropriate children's activities across settings, based on the CPI measure

Overall Average for Inappropriate Children's Activities	SERVOL		Gov't		Private	
	x	sd	x	sd	x	sd
1. Children are doing the same things at the same time in large groups, most of the time..	1.8	1.4	3.0	1.5	4.1	1.3
2. Children +ed exactly what they will do and when.	2.7	1.5	3.0	1.5	4.2	1.3
3. Children use work-books, ditto sheets, flashcards and other abstract or two dimensional learning materials	3.6	.3	2.4	1.3	4.6	1.1
4. Children sit, watch, be quiet and listen or do paper and pencil tasks for major periods of time.	2.2	1.4	2.6	1.5	4.0	1.3
5. Children engage in reading and writing instruction: direct teaching of letter recognition, the alphabet, and colouring within lines.	1.6	1.4	2.0	1.5	4.3	1.4
6. Children have planned lessons in writing with pencils, colouring predrawn forms, tracing or correct use of scissors.	3.8	1.6	3.3	1.6	4.0	1.4
7.Children respond correctly to one right answer.	1.5	.9	1.6	.9	4.0	1.4

1 - rarely seen 3 - frequently 5 - consistently seen

2- sometimes 4- most often seen

Unlike the public setting, 60% of private centres have programmes parallel to primary programmes where children use workbooks, ditto sheets, flashcards, and abstract or two dimensional learning materials. In the public setting these activities were only briefly observed in 20% of the sample. In most of the public setting, children did not use abstract materials or workbooks.

Even though teachers in the SERVOL centres guided a large group of children through art activities children did spend time using a variety of art media including finger painting, clay, glue, paper and cloth in ways of their choosing. Children in the private setting generally did not have opportunities to take part in these activities. In 60% of the private setting, art projects were frequently observed to be predrawn forms or copying of adult-made models.

While > 75% of centres in the public setting were places where children's art projects were most often teacher-initiated, children chose the ways in which they wanted to express their ideas within teacher -initiated themes or topics.

Centre-based practices - The findings

When centre practices, the second indicator of quality, (here defined as the daily strategies used by the adults in their provision of ECCE) were evaluated, similar patterns emerged. Since only one classroom for 4 - 5 year olds was observed and only one teacher usually the senior teacher was observed, 79 teachers and their practices were observed. Once again considering the adult practices defined as developmentally appropriate, teacher/caregivers at SERVOL centres engaged in many developmentally appropriated practices. Centre practices in government and private centres, however, had lower ratings on appropriateness.

As expected, children were not encouraged to spontaneously initiate many of their activities in both settings. Teachers in over 50% of the centres in both settings had set up materials for children to choose from but adults only allowed children to use these activities during a block of time at the beginning and end of the day or during free-play activity time. Children, however, typically worked in large groups.

Similarly, when children's work patterns were observed, there were differences in the ways children spent their time. As many as 70% of private centres kept children in large group activities during their stay in centre-based provision. This practice was most often observed in the private centres where children rarely worked individually or in small groups (See Table 7). In the public setting, however, there were some differences, particularly in the SERVOL centres. Children were usually in small groups and were observed doing different things most of the time. Over 30% of the public settings had some kind of small group activities during the daily programme, while within just over 20% of these centres, children were observed working individually or in child-chosen groups most of the time.

Table7 Percentage distribution of children working in small groups across settings, based on the CPI measure

Appropriate Practice	Public		Private
	SERVOL	Gov't	
Children work individually or in small, child-chosen groups most of the time. Different children are doing different things.	n=10	n=9	n=60
	% n	% n	% n
Setting compared to appropriate practice			
- Not like this setting	10 (1)	34 (3)	70 (42)
- Very little like this setting	10 (1)	- -	12 (7)
- Somewhat like this setting	40 (4)	33 (3)	8 (5)
- Much like this setting	10 (1)		2 (1)
- Very much like this setting	30 (3)	22 (2)	8 (5)

Teachers were also found to spent more time encouraging children to give more than one right answer in the public setting. Table 8 shows that less than 33% of private centres were found to encourage divergent thinking from the types of questions they asked children. In over 80%, and 78% of SERVOL and government centres respectively, teachers were found to ask at least some questions which encouraged creative thinking. Yet, at the same time, teachers lectured and

expected children to sit down, watch, be quiet and listen. At private, SERVOL and government centres, teachers expected children to do paper and pencil tasks for major periods of time at 66%, 30%, 22% of the time, respectively.

Table 8 Percentage distribution of encouraging divergent thinking across settings, based on the CPI measure

Appropriate Practice	Public				Private	
	SERVOL		Gov't			
Children are encouraged to give more than one right answer when questioned by teachers.	n=10		n=9		n=60	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Setting compared to appropriate practice						
- Not like this setting	-	-	11	(1)	67	(40)
- Very little like this setting	20	(2)	11	(1)	12	(7)
- Somewhat like this setting	20	(2)	33	(3)	7	(4)
- Much like this setting	20	(2)	34	(3)	8	(5)
- Very much like this setting	40	(4)	11	(1)	7	(4)

Generally, teachers were pleasant across both settings and the most often seen appropriate practice in the public setting was the use of touching and smiling and speaking affectionately to children at arrival and departure times.

In the private setting this practice was frequently seen (See Table10). Of the 10 criteria for appropriate centre practices, SERVOL centres had the overall highest scores as indicated in Table 10. Teachers were consistently seen getting children involved in activities by stimulating their interest, giving them daily opportunities to choose materials, providing a variety of art media and displaying positive affect and warmth in their interaction with those in their care. Overall, all 10 critiera in Table 10, were rarely seen in the private setting and their scores ranged from 1.1 (rarely seen) to 3.2 (frequently).

Table 9 Overall average score on appropriate centre practices across settings, based on the CPI measure

Overall average for Appropriate Centre Practices	SERVOL		Gov't		Private	
	x	sd	x	sd	x	sd
1.Teachers ask questions that encourage children to give more than one right answer.	3.8	1.2	3.2	1.2	1.8	1.3
2. Teachers use activities such as block building, measuring, woodworking and drawing to help children learn concepts in math, science and social studies.	4.3	1.0	2.1	1..2	1.6	1..2
3.Teachers provide a variey of art media for children to use in ways of their choosing.	5.0	.9	3.7	1.1	2.0	1..2
4. Teachers get children involved in activities by stimulating their natural curiosity and interest.	5.0	.9	3.7	1.1	2.0	1..2
5.Teachers provide opportunities for children to read, andwrite in ways that are useful to them.	3.7	1.6	2.9	1.4	1.6	1.0
6. Teachers give children daily opportunities to choose and use manipulatives	5.0	.5	4.0	.9	1.9	1.3
7. Teachers show affection by smiling, holding and speaking to children at their eye level.	5.0	.9	4.1	1.4	3.2	1.3
8. Adults create a centre-based environment which is marked by pleasant sounds and excitement	4.1	1.2	3.0	1.4	1.9	1.1
9.Teachers use positive guidance techniques, such as modelling and redirecting.	1.3	.7	1.1	.3	1.1	.7
10. Teachers talk about feelings. They encourage children to put their emotions into words.	1.4	.7	1.0	.0	1.2	.6

1 - rarely seen 3 - frequently 5 - consistently seen

2- sometimes 4- most often seen

Inappropriate practices seemed to be the hallmark of the private setting which consistently scored highly on the CPI measures (See Table 10). Overall average scores on inappropriate practicefor the private setting, as Table 10 indicates, ranged from 2 (sometimes seen) to 4.4 (most often seen). Whereas in the public setting across all CPI criteria for inappropriate practice, the scores were quite low.

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With the exception of one Montessori centre, content areas were time-tabled at all centres and children were observed in structured group activities where separate times or periods were set aside for them to learn material or information on specific content areas. These included: mathematics, science, social studies or reading and writing. Over 75% of centres in the private setting emphasised reading and writing instruction of letter recognition, recitation, reciting the alphabet, colouring within the lines and the formation of letters. Only approximately 10% of the teachers in the public setting used these activities.

Teachers in the SERVOL centres, (10/10) were observed to use block building, measuring ingredients for cooking and drawing to help children learn concepts in mathematics, science and social studies. Teachers in less than 10% of private centres were found to use these activities to help children learn concepts.

Socio-emotional development and four year olds - The findings

The third quality measure - that is the practices used by teachers to foster socio-emotional development among four year olds were also rated on the CPI scale. Teachers in SERVOL centres were most frequently observed working to create and maintain pleasant surroundings for children in their care. Most teachers used friendly and pleasant tones with children and adults and were approachable to children and parents.

They smiled frequently and tried to manage the environment. Generally in the public setting, the environments children were exposed to were pleasant. Across both settings, however, teachers frequently used developmentally inappropriate strategies as guidance or as discipline techniques. Developmentally appropriate techniques such as redirection, positive reinforcement and encouragement were rarely observed.

In fact, teachers were not observed discussing feelings and they were rarely observed in either setting encouraging children to put their emotions and ideas into words. The average overall rating was 1.1 (rarely seen) across both settings

Interpersonal Environment - The findings

When the fourth quality indicator, the interpersonal environment of public and private settings was analysed a somewhat different pattern emerged. Teachers in public settings, particularly the SERVOL centres interacted with the children, and played indoor games with them. Although almost all teachers in public ECCE centres visited were called "Auntie", there was a range of interaction which may reflect how Aunts are viewed culturally within Trinidad and Tobago. "Auntie" may be used for a family member or a close friend of the family in Trinidad and Tobago.The relationship may be one in which there is a very strong bond or Auntie may just demand respect from those who refer to her accordinglyly. In more academic private centres, however, teachers were also called "Miss" but the first name was used - for example, Miss Shelia." This has its roots in ECCE in Trinidad and Tobago where past primary school teachers, owned and operated private schools. Miss was to be respected and revered by 4 year old and environments reflected this top-down approach to interaction between adults and children within many of these centres.

Table 10 illustrates the large numbers of centres in which children were in classrooms that were overly dominated by the adult. With the exception of the public centres where it was only seen 30%, 33% of the time at the SERVOL and government centres respectively, it was observed at 87% of the private centres. Generally teachers did not expect too much verbal interaction with children and teachers generally expected children to follow their plans. Over one third of the public centres were teacher-directed and teacher dominated in spite of their child-centred philosophy. Generally private centres (82%) were teacher -directed most of the day.

Table 10 Percentage distribution of a teacher -directed activity across settings based on the CPI measure

Inappropriate Practice	Public		Private
	SERVOL	Gov't	
The teacher tells children exactly what they will do and when. The teacher expects children to follow her plans.	n=10	n=9	n=60
	% n	% n	% n
Setting compared to inappropriate practice			
- Not like this setting	70 (7)	22 (2)	8 (5)
- Very little like this setting	- -	45 (4)	5 (3)
- Somewhat like this setting	20 (2)	11 (1)	15 (9)
- Much like this setting	- -	11 (1)	3 (2)
- Very much like this setting	10 (1)	11 (1)	69 (41)

In summary, when children's activities were observed and evaluated using the CPI criteria, the public setting offered higher quality provision than private settings. SERVOL centres, in particular, offered children greater opportunities to take part in activities which were developmentally appropriate.

Community involvement in programmes - The findings

Teachers in the public setting expected parents to become part of the programme, particularly in SERVOL centres. In SERVOL centres parents were observed making materials under the direction of teachers and at one centre a parent was seen painting the walls around the property. Parents in SERVOL centres who were unable to pay part or all of their fees were allowed to do tasks at the centre in lieu of payment. The most frequently talked about tasks by teachers were, cutting the grass outside the property and repairing the furniture. Parents were also observed helping children with festival arrangements for the social studies theme.

Parents in the private setting were rarely seen in the centres except at drop off and pick up times. Teachers in the private setting when asked whether they wanted parent involvement in the classroom answered negatively. However, that parent had a role in fund-raising for school projects and in providing materials the school may ask for and if possible, attending school outings and sports day. Parents were also highly involved in the sports day activity which was an annual affair. Particularly in the private setting it can be an extravagant affair. Children wore costumes, marched and took part in competitive races. Members of the community were also involved either through fund raising or were present to present prizes or as specially invited guests.

3. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH INADEQUATE ADULT PRACTICE

One of the fundamental reasons for establishing ECCE centres is to provide environments which would enhance the developmental skills of children under five. Adults, however, influence and control ECCE settings. Furthermore, they are largely responsible for the activities and practices which affect the development of young children. Arising out of the data collected and the trends that have emerged from the analysis a number of causes can be identified for the on-going problem of inadequate adult practice.

As illustrated in Chart 1, a number of causes are identified as affecting the delivery of provision. Immediate causes include the lack of training and the refusal of teachers to use non-traditional methods. Poor practice has indeed affected the quality of programmes offered. Poor adult practices have led to: 1. highly academic programmes which often are above the developmental level of children 2. limited use of concrete materials and 3. the lack of opportunities for young children to socialise.

Yet, teachers and caregivers are not the only ones responsible for the quality of life children experience in classrooms. Government policies, institutions and social service agencies, also influence the quality of provision. In Trinidad and Tobago, at present, there are no national

CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF PROBLEMS

Chart 1 - CAUSAL ANALYSIS OF INADEQUATE ECCE ADULT PRACTICES

Manifestations	Immediate Causes	Underlying Causes *Individual, Household Community*	Basic Causes *Individual, Household Community*	Structural Causes *Individual, Household Community*
Highly academic programmes Largely teacher centred activities Children give one right answer Regimented timetabling Limited activities using concrete materials Lack of choice of materials Limited/no outdoor activities Corporal punishment Lack of opportunities for socialization	Lack of training Poor training Refusal to use non-traditional methods	Teacher's inability to allow children to be active learners Inappropriate notion of what is good practice ***Institutional/ Social Service Provision*** Poor supervision of teacher trainees Lack of resources No monitoring of staff activities Lack of institutional will to change from traditional methods	Poor training No training Pressure from parents to retain traditional models ***Institutional/ Social Service Provision*** No explicit national minimal standards for programme delivery Limited practicum modules in training programmes at private institutions	Parent anxiety for "head-start" into primary system Communities lack understanding of alternative practices ***Institutional Social Service Provision*** Competitive educational system Overemphasis on academic work

minimal standards for public and private ECCE programmes. Similarly, training programmes also need to expose trainees to longer supervised practice sessions to prevent them from reverting to traditional methods and to offer them more opportunities to internalise new learning and become more proficient in the use of new methods.

4. REVIEW OF POLICIES, PLANS AND PROGRAMMES

The following is a review of present policies and programmes which have been implemented to improve the quality of ECCE programmes.

i. **Upgrading the skills of ECCE staff. The Fourth (GOTT/IBRD) Basic Education Project** seeks to train 65 pre-service and in-service teachers annually for a period of five years to work as teachers in the new centres when they are built. At present students are undergoing training at the School of Continuing Studies and at SERVOL. Three hundred (300) teachers are to be trained through this initiative over the next five years.

ii. **Upgrading the present levels of teachers' salaries.** It is proposed that certified teachers be given an increase in salary from $500.00 to $900.00 per month.

iii. **In-service Training of Early Childhood Care and Education Facilitators.** Twenty-six (26) ECCE facilitators / field-officers, trainers and administrators are presently participating in a ten month programme which focuses on improved ECCE provision for children in the 3-5 age group. One of the objectives of this training component is to ensure that all invited in providing a national system of ECCE share the same vision and are working closely towards a shared notion of quality.

iv. **Modification of Existing ECCE Teacher -Training Programmes.** In keeping with the recommendations of the Trinidad and Tobago Early Childhood Survey (Logie and Weikart, 1995) on improving quality through training, modifications were made to the existing teacher training programme. Members of SERVOL, School of Continuing Studies, the EPCU and the Ministry of Education, worked towards one harmonised curriculum for both training agencies.Course expectations, length of training, certification and course content were reviewed and a revised document is now being used to meet the challenges of providing quality programmes for children in disadvantaged circumstances.

5. UNMET NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Although great strides have been made within the last five years to develop a comprehensive approach to ECCE provision there are a number of unmet needs and challenges which continue to affect programme quality. There are:

i. A need for the establishment of national minimal standards, particularly for those who work in the private setting;

ii. The need for an accreditation board for all centre programmesa in Trinidad and Tobago. The board should be charged with setting standards and monitoring practices in ECCE settings;

iii. A need for the development of training programmes for caregivers of children under 3 in order to alleviate the lack of knowledge on child development issues and lack of trainingwhich exist at present;

iv. The need for greater access to training for teachers in rural areas to upgrade their skills.

v. A need for social services to be an integral part of the delivery process for children under five;

vi. A need for resources at the centres. Due to the lack of resources, teachers resort to traditional 'talk and chalk' methods. It is therefore imperative that along with training, priority be given to equiping centres with appropriate materials.

6. PRIORITIES FOR ACTION/ RECOMMENDATIONS

i High priority should be given to creating an accreditation board to set standards for early childhood care and education centres. This should be maintained through the hiring of

adequate staff to examine the management and supervision of facilities through frequent inspection.

ii. Non-governmental Organisations, the private sector, the Ministry of Social Development, The Ministry of Health, The Ministry of Education and other stakeholders should be actively involved in collaborative projects to improve the quality of life children and families at the centres.

iii. Workshops and projects should be developed to meet the teacher-training needs of men and women particularly those in economically deprived communities.

iv. The NCECCE should be reconstituted immediately to implement policy decisions. On-going staff development / training programmes for ECCE teachers and caregivers should be part of the NCECCE's annual agenda.

v. The gathering of a systematic statistical data-base of information on ECCE matters, should be responsibility of the NCECCE.

vi. Priority should be given to the immediate implementation, monitoring and evaluation of ECCE programmes for children ages 0 -2+.

vii Training institutions should coordinate efforts and integrate their programmes as far as possible, to clarify teaching goals and activities.

viii. The activities of funding agencies in ECCE should be linked to overall national plans by involving a multiplicity of partners from government and non-government agencies in on-going initiatives.

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ix. High quality government-owned/assisted centres for children 0-2 should be established to facilitate working mothers and families in high risk populations, and finally,

x. Links with other Caribbean countries should be established as a means of sharing experiences and joining in a collaborative plan of action to improve the quality of ECCE delivery for young children.

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